

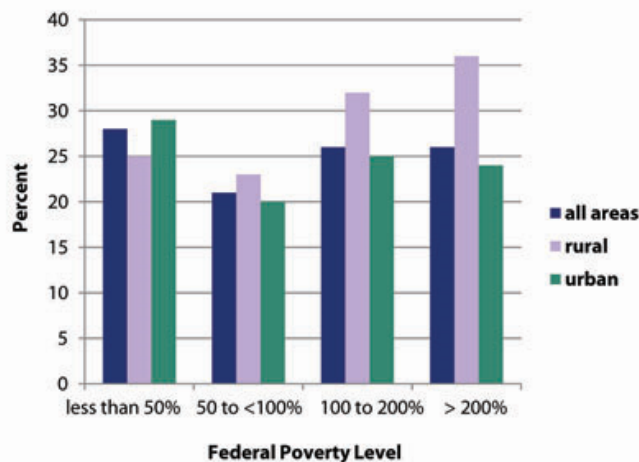
Media Relations

Carsey Institute: Reported Child Abuse Claims Often Difficult To Prove

'Substantiation' Of Abuse Impacts Whether Children Receive Services

May 30, 2012

Percentage of Child Abuse Cases Substantiated by Federal Poverty Level and Place



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DURHAM, N.H. – Only a quarter of all reported cases of child abuse are found to have sufficient evidence to take action, with higher-income children in rural areas more likely than their urban counterparts to have a report of child abuse substantiated, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

The research was conducted by Wendy Walsh, research associate professor of sociology at the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center and a research associate at the Carsey Institute, and Marybeth Mattingly, director of research on vulnerable families at the Carsey Institute and a research assistant professor of sociology at UNH. It is presented in the brief "Understanding Child Abuse in Rural and Urban America: Risk Factors



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and Maltreatment Substantiation."

According to the researchers, whether an incidence of child abuse is substantiated by Child Protective Services (CPS) – whether there is sufficient evidence to believe an act of abuse took place – often impacts subsequent decisions, such as whether a child or family receives counseling or other types of services, and whether the child will be removed from his or her home.

"Recent evidence finds that 61 percent of children with a substantiated report received services compared with 26 percent of children without a substantiated report. Further, in 35 states, the decision to expunge a record of a given report is based, at least in part, on substantiation status or similar criteria. This practice is important as courts often use previous reports to assess the risk of current harm to a child," the researchers said.

The key research findings are as follows:

- Approximately one-fourth of all cases investigated by CPS are substantiated.
- Across America, 25 percent of supervisory neglect cases, 24 percent of sexual abuse cases, and 22 percent of physical neglect are substantiated.
- Caregivers' risk factors, including drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, and a recent arrest, increase the likelihood that a child maltreatment report is substantiated. Nearly one-half of caregivers with three or more risk factors have a substantiated report compared with an estimated 22 percent with only one or two risks, and 11 percent of caregivers with no risk factors.
- Important differences emerge between rural and urban America:

- Higher-income children (children in families with incomes greater than 200 percent of the federal poverty level) in rural areas are significantly more likely to have a report substantiated than those in urban places.
- Older children in rural places are more likely to have a report substantiated (35 percent) than those in urban areas (23 percent).
- Caregivers in rural areas with active domestic violence or with cognitive impairments are more likely to have a case substantiated than similar urban caregivers.

The complete Carsey Institute report about this research is available at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/CarseySearch/search.php?id=196>.

This analysis is based on the second National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW II), a national probability sample of children who had a maltreatment report that resulted in a child welfare investigation collected by RTI International on behalf of the U.S. Administration on Children and Families. The NSCAW II cohort includes 5,873 children, ages birth to 17.5 years old, who had contact with the child welfare system within a 15-month period beginning in February 2008.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy research on vulnerable children, youth, and families and on sustainable community development. The institute gives policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

GRAPHICS

Figure 1

Percentage of Child Abuse Cases Substantiated by Federal Poverty Level and Place

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/carsey/childabuse_fig1.jpg

Figure 3

Number of Caregiver Risk Factors for Cases Substantiated in Rural and Urban Areas

http://www.unh.edu/news/img/carsey/childabuse_fig3.jpg

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T-hall

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